

## *The Professional Service Firm 50*

By Tom Peters

Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1999

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"Fifty ways to transform your 'department' into a professional service firm whose trademarks are passion and innovation!" Thus starts Tom Peters in another of the *50Lists Series* books that describe work in today's knowledge-based economy. So what is a professional service firm (PSF)? What lessons are to be learned from such firms and how might the acquisition community apply these lessons?

In the first chapter, Tom Peters states, "The starting point of all significant change is mind-set. I.e., shifting from the internally focused, 'task' mind-set to a fanatical 'Incredible-Client-Service-through-Awesome-Projects' mindset." He suggests that organizations that take on a winning PSF attitude must transform their human resources department, purchasing, finance, and other so-called support services into client-focused, value-added entities. Only in this way will the entire enterprise contribute to the organization's and client's shared success.

In Chapter 2, the author states that this change in attitude is all encompassing, transforming one's point of view as well as one's day-to-day vocabulary. For example, *customers* become *clients* who then become *partners*. Members of today's professional service firms enter into an intimate relationship with their clients as business processes are transformed and capabilities strengthened. In Peters' own words: "A client is ...

- a partner
- someone with whom I have an intimate relationship
- in it with me for the long haul
- someone with whom I co-invent the future
- a person/organization in whose outcomes I have a big personal stake
- someone with whom I have an emotional bond
- someone with whom I can't work if trust is not paramount
- a fellow professional who, like me, wrestles with intractable problems
- the source of my reputation (for better or for worse)
- my No. 1 'word-of-mouth' marketer!

- someone who grows with me
- someone who loses when I lose
- someone who wins when I win."

Chapters 3 through 50 outline how professional service firms must seek out clients who are leaders, fire bad clients, commit to working on cool projects, achieve wow results, manage a project portfolio, position oneself closely with their clients, pursue excellence with passion, take risks on quirky projects, work with a sense of urgency that exudes enthusiasm, etc. Critics will say that this list of 50 commandments—the gospel according to "Saint Peters"—is too long, the author's tone too strident. Others will say that Tom Peters is ranting and repeating himself. Some will see this as the same old stuff drawn from *In Search of Excellence*, *A Passion for Excellence*, *Thriving on Chaos*, or *The Pursuit of Wow!* packaged in a new cover.

This reviewer thinks otherwise for the following reasons:

- Each chapter is about four to six pages in length, and this makes for easy reading as well as bite-sized consumption. This book begs to be read on the commuter train, at the subway station, in a grocery line, or during those 10-15 minute periods we all find between appointments. Each chapter is focused, thought-provoking, and insightful. Today's pace lends itself sound bites, quick summaries, and Web-like design. With this book, form follows function.

- Each chapter begins with a fairly clear thesis statement—what Peters labels, "The Nub"—and ends with suggested "Things To Do (TTDs)." In between, the author offers cogent examples drawn from commercially successful companies, shares relevant business stories, or explains his rationale behind each thought or observation.

- Peters cites statistics, plots trends, and gives references throughout the book and does so in detail. Additional reading suggestions are offered for continued study of leading professional services and consulting firms.

So why read this book? Acquisition professionals are called upon to provide the absolutely very best products and services to support both current and future operations. Simply stated, acquisition professionals must wow and delight their clients for the very lives of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines depend upon the collective best judgment and the professional services this community offers today. That said, Tom Peters' *The Professional Service Firm 50* is a must-read guidebook for positive change and an excellent addition to the acquisition professional's library.

## ***Project Management for the Technical Professional***

By Michael Singer Dobson,  
Project Management Institute, 2001

*Reviewed by LTC Kenneth H. Rose (USA, Ret.), a Management Consultant in Hampton, VA, and former member of the Army Acquisition Corps.*

Most technical professionals have faced the prospect of moving from a staff to a management position. To some, it was a welcome challenge; to others, a never-ending nightmare. Michael Singer Dobson addresses this situation in a new book, *Project Management for the Technical Professional*, which provides practical advice for a successful transition.

The book is divided into four sections. The first focuses on individual leadership. Dobson starts strong on Page 1 with a clear graphic that shows leadership as something that originates from within and looks outward. Readers would do well to prepare a contrasting image: write the word "me" on a piece of paper and surround it with a circle of inward-pointing arrows. If this image depicts their view of leadership, what follows will do them a world of good.

Readers should keep their pencils close at hand, for Dobson intends his book to be an interactive journey. Frequent exercises require readers to get involved by doing things, not just reading about them. Section 1 includes a survey aimed at "knowing thyself," as well as exercises that require readers to think about what they have read and how it applies to them.

Dobson's final point in Section 1 is that moving into management is nothing less than a career change that demands different goals, skills, and methods. It requires a broader view and an ability to recognize and deal with problems that may be very fuzzy, complex, and new.

Section 2 presents some tools for the new manager. People skills are paramount. Dobson reviews the classic styles of management and reminds readers that a combination of styles tailored to the situation is usually most effective. He reviews the criticality of communication and provides guidance on giving feedback to others, emphasizing the importance of listening. Delegation is an essential task for new managers. Dobson offers a diagnostic exercise and clear advice on what to delegate and how to do so.

Recruiting, hiring, training, and the always-thorny issue of performance appraisal get down-to-earth treatment. Dobson's summary of motivation theory is clear and concise. His discussion of conflict management is complete, including various foundations of conflict and how to address them.

Section 2 closes with an overview of the many "alphabet soup" management initiatives that new managers may encounter: TQM, MBO, ZBB (total quality management, management by objectives, zero-based budgeting), etc. The discussion will not make experts of readers, but will provide a level of functional literacy necessary for basic understanding.

Section 3 focuses on managing technical professionals. Dobson discusses technical culture and provides an amusing list of techno-terms. For example, "encrypted English" means that the writer has poor writing skills. But more important, Dobson offers useful suggestions for changing culture in a technical environment.

Technical projects are often completed by teams. Dobson's extensive treatment of this issue is one of the book's great strengths. Good teams don't just happen. New managers must know both techniques and traps if they are to get this right. A sound discussion of power and informal organizations combines to make Section 3 the real powerhouse of this fine book.

Section 4 is the book's only shortcoming. At 14 pages, this section on managing technical projects hardly fulfills the promise of the book's title. But this is not a fatal flaw. Dobson's brief introduction to project management is probably best fleshed out by perusal of the *PMBOK® Guide*. So much of value precedes this section that duplication of detail is both unnecessary and unwise.

*Project Management for the Technical Professional* is a unique and valuable addition to project management literature. Throughout, author Dobson illustrates theory with a series of case studies—brief stories that clarify content by way of real-world examples. He uses references from popular films and cartoons to illuminate points in an engaging and memorable way. In so doing, Dobson has produced a text that speaks to today's professionals in today's language, communicating information and knowledge that will aid the leap from technical worker to technical leader.

This book is available for \$34.95 from Project Management Institute at <http://www.pmibookstore.org>.

## **Army's MRICD Featured In New Book**

The research findings of scientists pursuing the Army's mission of developing medical protections against the effects of chemical warfare agents are the substance of a new book by CRC Press entitled *Chemical Warfare Agents: Toxicity at Low Levels*. The book is edited by Dr. Satu M. Somani of the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, and COL James A. Romano Jr., who holds a doctorate in experimental psychology. Somani has conducted research on nerve agents for more than 15 years while under contract with the U.S. Army

## BOOKS

Medical Research and Materiel Command. Romano is the Commander of the Army Medical Research Institute of Chemical Defense (MRICD), Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD. MRICD is DOD's premiere laboratory for medical chemical defense research.

Seven of the book's 14 chapters were authored or co-authored by MRICD experts in toxicity of chemical warfare agents and experts in development of medical countermeasures. Additionally, scientists from MRICD's sister laboratory—the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research—contributed to the book, as did scientists from the Army Edgewood Chemical Biological Center, the Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, academia, and allied government research laboratories.

The comprehensive text covers topics such as the health effects of low-level exposure to nerve agents and to the blister agent sulfur mustard, the acute and chronic toxicity of cyanide and riot-control agents, the development of pharmacological countermeasures to botulinum intoxication, and the psychological factors in chemical warfare and terrorism. Chapters also explore how stress can affect the toxicity of chemical agents, the effectiveness of treatment compounds, and the Army's pursuit of new methods of detoxification through the development of circulating scavenger enzymes and enzymes covalently bound to a decontaminating sponge. The final chapter discusses the emergency response to a chemical warfare incident and describes domestic preparedness, first response, and public health considerations.

## ACQUISITION REFORM

### Important Memorandums

*Note: The point of contact for the following acquisition reform article is Monti Jagers, (703) 681-7571, [monteze.jagers@saalt.army.mil](mailto:monteze.jagers@saalt.army.mil).*

*Prior to his departure, then Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Dr. Jacques S. Gansler signed two very important memorandums that will significantly enhance the use of commercial practices and acquisitions in DOD. The subject of the first memorandum is commercial acquisitions, and the subject of the second is incentive strategies for Defense acquisitions.*

### Commercial Acquisitions

This memorandum directs that "To the maximum extent possible, commercial acquisitions should be conducted using Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 12." The integrated process team (IPT) that was chartered to review DOD commercial-item determinations found that obstacles to assessing commercial items include inconsistent commercial-item determinations, weak market research, and confusion concerning pricing of commercial items. The memo further directs that the following actions be taken to help overcome the barriers:

- Provide clarification on FAR Part 12 use for consistency in DOD,
- Establish goals,
- Request each Service and Defense agency provide an implementation plan to meet goals, and
- Request the IPT to determine feasibility of establishing a pilot program for developing a central database or other tools to assist in consistent commercial-item determinations.

Additionally, the attachment to this memo provides some immediate clarification, and the Commercial Item Handbook provides further guidance. The complete memorandum and attachment can be found at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/ar/doc/commercialacq010501.pdf>.

### Defense Acquisitions

This memorandum stresses the importance of adopting "incentive strategies to successfully attract, motivate and reward traditional and non-traditional contractors, thus ensuring successful performance. Incentive strategies must also maximize the use of commercial practices to enhance our ability to attract non-traditional contractors."

As noted above, program teams are encouraged to structure incentive strategies to attract nontraditional Defense entities and reward successful performance of traditional Defense firms. Thorough market research should be conducted to develop a better understanding of the business strategy from the viewpoints of both the government and the contractor, leading to behavior that jointly achieves the mutual goals of all parties (e.g., best-value acquisitions and targeting high performance based on best-business practices).

Additionally, the memo's attachment provides guidance that amplifies existing policy regarding use of incentives in Defense acquisitions. To assist the acquisition workforce, an incentive guidebook is also being developed based on work conducted by the Army and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The memorandum, attached guidance, and guidebook can be found at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/ar/doc/incentives010501.pdf>.